



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

MONTANA WOLF PROGRAM WEEKLY REPORT

To: Interested Parties

From: MFWP Wolf Program Coordinator, Carolyn Sime

Subject: Wolf Program Activities and Related Information, March 29 - May 2, 2008

Wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountains (NRM) were delisted on March 28, 2008 from the federal list of threatened and endangered species. The USFWS successfully recovered and delisted the population with the help of state, federal, tribal and non-governmental partners. Wolf conservation and management responsibilities now reside with the states of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming and the respective Indian Tribes.

The Montana Wolf Conservation and Management Plan, state guidelines, and state laws now govern wolf conservation and management in Montana. Wolves are currently listed as a state endangered species under Montana state law and are expected to be reclassified as a Species in Need of Management later this summer. Wolves are and will still be protected by state laws throughout Montana, but could be killed by a citizen if seen actively chasing, harassing, biting, wounding, or attacking livestock under Montana's "defense of property" statute, in defense of human life, or through regulated public harvest at some time in the future. The "defense of property" statute that allows protection of livestock is similar to the old "10j federal regulations" that used to apply to southern Montana, although is more conservative with respect to domestic dogs not used for herding or guarding livestock (see Wolf-Livestock Activities section below for more details).

When wolves were delisted, the USFWS discontinued the publication of the NRM wolf weekly, effective beginning March 28. Individually, the states of Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming compile their own wolf weekly reports which can be viewed on each state website, respectively. This first Montana Wolf Program Weekly Report covers the period of time between the end of the last USFWS Weekly (March 29, 2008) to Friday May 2. As such, this first report will be longer than future reports.

Contributors to the Montana Wolf Weekly are Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), Universities, USDA Wildlife Services (WS), the National Park Service (NPS; Glacier NP; Yellowstone National Park will be reported in the Wyoming Wolf Weekly), US Forest Service, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Blackfoot Nation.

FWP will compile information about wolves and their conservation and management in Montana on a weekly basis. Highlighted activities relate to: monitoring, wolf – livestock interactions, outreach and education, research, law enforcement, and other miscellaneous topics of public interest. The Weekly Report will be available on each Monday, covering the previous week. It can be found at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

Wolf Monitoring Activities

At the end of 2007, the Montana wolf population was estimated at a minimum of 422 wolves, 73 packs and 39 Breeding Pairs according the federal recovery criteria. The 2008 Montana Wolf Program Annual Report can be found on the FWP wolf page.

During the week of March 20th, WS opportunistically darted two wolves while doing other routine work. On the 17th, a gray adult female was collared in the Wall Creek area. On the 18th, a gray adult male was collared in the Upper Ruby. Subsequent monitoring will be necessary to determine if they are affiliated with a pack.

On April 7th, WS captured and collared a black yearling female wolf in the Baker Mountain Pack south of Big Timber. FWP/WS cooperative efforts had been underway to place a collar in this group of 3 wolves that have been seen frequently on private lands and near livestock in the West Boulder River area.

Wolf - Livestock Activities

A late start to spring has kept wintering ungulates and wolves in lower elevations mostly along winter range later than in previous years, creating more potential for wolves to be in close proximity to cattle calving or sheep lambing operations on private lands.

When wolves were delisted on March 28, 2008, the activities of FWP and livestock owners are now guided by the Montana Wolf Plan, guidelines adopted by FWP and the FWP Commission, and Montana state law. The Guidelines are available on the FWP wolf webpage.

Livestock owners can non-injuriouly haze or harass wolves when they are too close to livestock at any time. Livestock owners can kill a wolf that is seen actively killing or threatening to kill livestock or herding/guarding animals on either private or public land. Such incidents must be reported to FWP within 72 hours. Owners of companionship dogs or hunting dog breeds can non-injuriouly haze or harass wolves. Dog owners can kill a wolf that is seen actively attacking or killing their dog. The flexibility to protect livestock and domestic dogs is provided in Montana law in the “defense of property” statute that also pertains to mountain lions or black bears caught damaging private property.

If a livestock owner suspects that wolves injured or killed livestock, protect the physical evidence at the sight and contact USDA Wildlife Services.

On March 28, a landowner northwest of Darby reported that one of their dogs (a young Aussie Shepherd x Lab mix) may have been killed by a wolf. There had been several lion

problems in this general area previously, so FWP Warden Royce did an initial investigation. The dog had already been buried, but some larger canid tracks were found nearby along with numerous other dog tracks from the owner's other dogs – so tracking conditions prevented confirmation of a wolf. The owners reported that they had seen a black wolf on the property recently and had seen tracks on several occasions. They also reported hearing wolves on the ridge above their house. Bradley followed up the morning of the 29th and found that the Trapper Peak pack was in the area. Lacking firm physical evidence, FWP determined it was a probable wolf incident. FWP described the state law and guidelines for protecting livestock and dogs and shared ideas with owners about how to better protect their dogs. FWP closely monitored the pack over the next several days but no further incidents occurred and the pack had left the area by the next day.

On March 29, WS confirmed 2 dead sheep killed by a wolf in the Paradise Valley in a ranchette / subdivision setting on a private land parcel of about 100 acres. One gray was seen in the pasture. FWP Warden Miller had received several calls about an apparently tame / habituated gray wolf in the Pray / Emigrant area and a wolf walking down the highway. Other public reports suggested it was a very small wolf. Its origin was unknown, but after consulting with other landowners in the area, FWP believed it was the same animal responsible for killing sheep. Due to the close proximity of houses and dogs in the area WS could not set traps. Because of safety concerns, FWP will closely monitor to remove any habituated wolves and area landowners were made aware of state laws and guidelines regarding protection of livestock and human safety. No further incidents have been reported.

On March 31 or April 1, FWP received a call from a landowner in Rock Creek in the Paradise Valley who reported their neighbors had a wolf try to bite their dog (breed unknown). They shot in the air a few times and scared the wolf off. FWP was not able to confirm directly with the dog owner, but the caller said they would pass along the state law/guidelines information to the dog's owner.

On April 1, WS removed the last two wolves from the Moccasin Lake pack in the Boulder south of Big Timber. All members of the pack had been involved in earlier depredations on private land – a calf confirmed killed on March 15th, cattle run through a fence in the same pasture on the 16th, and 2 sheep confirmed killed on March 19th. Shoot on sight permits given to the two landowners were canceled on April 1. FWP had initially authorized removal of two wolves after the 2 cattle incidents and two wolves were killed on the 19th. The two wolves were killed in close proximity to where the sheep were killed on the 19th and after WS found tracks of 1-2 wolves leaving the sheep corral near the house. WS continued investigating the area for wolf sign and saw wolves just up the hill from the pasture. WS and FWP discussed the situation and FWP authorized removal of the other two considering that all 4 had been involved in the depredations, potential was high for more losses, and the escalating pattern of keying into livestock as a food source in a short period of time. Because new wolves are likely to settle back into the area within the year, FWP will be working closely with the Boulder Watershed Group and other interested parties in search of more long-term solutions to decrease the risk of loss when wolves do recolonize the area.

On April 2, fladry that had been hung on private land in Tom Miner basin during calving operations was removed as cattle are now scattered among several pastures. Fladry was hung during calving as some members of the 8-Mile pack had been visible throughout the winter, but no livestock have been injured or killed by wolves.

On April 2, WS confirmed that a calf had been bitten and injured by a wolf south of Shamut (east of Melville). The calf had to be euthanized. WS was asked to collar and release any wolves in the area and FWP discussed the state's defense of property law and guidelines for addressing wolf-livestock conflicts. There are no known packs in the area and this could be a single wolf passing through the area.

As of April 2, efforts to collar and release a wolf after confirmed sheep depredations in the Two Dot area have been unsuccessful. No additional damage was reported and no reports of tracks or sign from either WS or area landowners. Five sheep had been confirmed killed and an additional 5 were confirmed wounded on March 5th.

On April 3, WS investigated an injured calf in Tom Miner Basin. No wolf damage was found.

On April 5, a ranch hand shot and killed a wolf on private land in the Madison Valley south of Ennis. The lone wolf was seen in a group of cattle and had separated a newborn domestic calf from the group. The individual reported the incident promptly. FWP personnel investigated and determined that the shooting was legal.

On April 8, WS killed 3 wolves in the Sage Creek area south of Dillon. WS had confirmed a dead calf on private land on March 23. Three wolves had been seen in and among cattle for a couple of weeks. There were depredations in the same area last year.

On April 10, WS investigated an injured bull on private land in the West Boulder area south of Big Timber. It was considered unconfirmed although the landowner had non-injurious hazed a wolf by their barn previously. Due to ongoing wolf presence in the area and the uncertainty about pack affiliation, FWP asked WS to collar and release a wolf on or near the property. WS collared and released a mangy female wolf in the West Boulder on April 15th. Traps were pulled and FWP and WS are monitoring the two new collars (other placed April 7) and staying in close communication with area landowners.

On April 15, WS confirmed a calf was killed by wolves on private land near Hall. The Willow Creek pack was 10 strong prior to birth of pups this spring and lives almost exclusively on private land – it is found routinely in and around livestock. Along one common travel route, FWP had recently hung fladry on private land to discourage wolves entering a one pasture with young calves. FWP had authorized removal of 2 wolves by WS and issued a permit to the landowner valid through May 30. One wolf was killed on April 18 and another was killed on April 21. On April 22, FWP representatives met with area landowners to discuss additional strategies to decrease the risk of further losses, including range riders, additional fladry, and reducing pack size to a more tolerable level as many mentioned they had fewer problems and concerns when the pack was not so big. A heavy snowpack and late spring has kept ungulates at lower elevations closer to livestock, increasing the chances for further conflicts. The pack has

historically denned on private land in an area where livestock will be placed in mid-June and did so again in 2008. The livestock owners have made some adjustments to their operations to decrease the risk of loss. Through the spring, FWP has been working proactively with the community to try to reduce conflicts and has increased monitoring. On April 23, WS confirmed that an adult ewe was killed by a wolf on private land near Hall. Due to the large pack size and the potential for more losses, FWP authorized WS to remove 6 additional wolves while working from private lands in the immediate area, leaving the alpha breeding pair and a newly – confirmed litter of pups. On May 2, WS accidentally killed the alpha male. Control work is ongoing to remove 4 uncollared yearlings, although efforts will include collaring a new adult that will help the alpha female raise the litter.

On April 16, WS confirmed 2 calves killed by wolves on private land south of Ennis on the west side of the Madison River. Six wolves were involved based on evidence at the scene. This is the same area where two confirmed depredations occurred in July and August of 2007 and a probable depredation in October of 2007 in which range riders bumped 5 wolves off a freshly-killed adult cow carcass (carcass was totally consumed and the immediate area had significant wolf sign). FWP had authorized USDA Wildlife Services to remove two wolves and that was completed in mid-December 2007. At the time of the control action, eight wolves were seen in the area and all had signs of mange on their tails. FWP personnel decided on April 16th to remove the remaining six wolves from this pack based on the history of depredations. As of May 2nd, a total of 3 wolves have been killed.

On April 24, WS confirmed wolves had killed 1 newborn calf and found another probable wolf-killed calf on private land near Helmville. The livestock producer saw 5 wolves at the site. A couple days prior, on the 22nd a calf was also confirmed killed by a single wolf on a neighboring ranch. After the loss on the 22nd, that landowner was issued a SOS permit for one wolf on their private property. Due to the proximity of the 2 depredations, members of the estimated 8-member uncollared Elevation Mtn pack are believed involved in both incidents. Potential for further conflict is high due to the high density of calving going on across a large area. FWP authorized WS to collar 1 wolf, and to kill up to 4 members of the pack, excluding the alpha female who could be nursing pups. On the 25th, the livestock producers chased a group of 6 wolves out of their cattle in the same area as the previous losses. Three of the wolves were harassing a mother cow with calf stashed nearby. The producer shot at one of the wolves, but missed. On April 30, WS killed a yearling male and control efforts are ongoing to kill up to 3 more wolves and to collar 1 wolf.

On April 24, FWP referred a call from a landowner in the Madison Valley near Bear Creek to WS. WS investigated a dead calf on April 25. The carcass has been mostly consumed and WS concluded it was a probable depredation so no lethal control was authorized. Cougar 2 Pack has been in the area for most of the winter and spring and FWP will continue to monitor and stay in close communication with area landowners.

On April 25, FWP set up some electric fladry on private land in Pinkham Creek southwest of Eureka. The landowner has had wolf activity the last 3 winters and is currently in the middle of calving operations. This private land parcel is adjacent to a Forest Service grazing allotment where livestock will be turned out and where the Lydia pack depredated last summer. The Lydia

pack may also have a den site in the area. FWP, the Forest Service, and permittees have been discussing options over the last year.

On April 28, FWP and WS exchanged information about a possible incident near Broadview. No wolf sign was found by WS.

On April 30, FWP received a call from a landowner in the West Boulder area south of Big Timber reporting that 3 wolves had attacked a calf. The landowner shot at the wolves, but missed and then took the calf to the vet. It is not known whether the calf will live or not, but WS confirmed that wolves were responsible. A second injured calf was found on May 1 and confirmed on May 2 and FWP/WS believe it was related to the depredation on the previous day. FWP has talked with the landowner and issued a permit for 1 wolf on their private land (valid through June 14 or until 1 wolves is killed). FWP will also increase monitoring to better determine whether the 3 wolves involved in these incidents are associated with the other two recently collared wolves.

On April 30, FWP and representatives of Defenders of Wildlife had a conference call to discuss an upcoming cooperative rider project in the Rock Creek Drainage east of Missoula in the Sapphire Pack territory. A RAGG box (noise / scare device triggered by detection of the signal of the radio collared animal) will also be activated soon.

On May 2, WS confirmed a calf was killed by wolves in the Big Hole Valley on private land. WS reported opportunistically seeing 4 wolves in the area about a week previous and at least 3 wolves were believed involved in the depredation. None are radio-collared and it is unknown whether they've whelped pups in the area. FWP authorized WS to kill up to 2 wolves (and to avoid killing a possible nursing female) and to look for options to trap and collar a 3rd (once snow melts out/mud dries up). A permit was given to the landowner for up to 2 wolves on the property where the loss occurred. Livestock have been killed by wolves in this same ranch in previous years. The permit will expire on June 16 or when a total of 2 wolves are killed.

General Notes: Many have asked about how FWP exercises its “new” discretion for addressing wolf-livestock conflicts as provided for in the state’s wolf plan, particularly with respect to lethal control now that wolves are officially delisted. Others have asked more general questions related to the total number of dead wolves in Montana or for the number of wolves killed by private citizens between March 28 and April 28 (first 30 days post delisting).

FWP and the FWP Commission adopted Guidelines (consistent with Montana’s plan) which guide agency decision-making when addressing wolf-livestock conflicts. State law guides what private citizens can do. FWP is implementing those Guidelines (on a statewide basis), and they are similar to the previous 10j rule that had applied in southern Montana prior to delisting. Confirmed damage by wolves based on an investigation by USDA Wildlife Services is required prior to implementation of any lethal control, and control efforts are terminated after a maximum of 45 days or upon removal of the pre-determined number of wolves, whichever is sooner.

Because Montana’s Guidelines are similar to the old “10j” rules, Montana has not authorized any more lethal control across southern Montana than would have been the case if wolves were still

listed or was the case during the same 30-day period in 2007. Across northern Montana, no injured or dead livestock have been reported and no lethal control has been authorized, which is not surprising because most livestock losses due to wolves occur in southwestern Montana where livestock densities are higher. Neither FWP nor Montana citizens have abused the transition from the federal legal framework to the state legal framework.

However, FWP and WS have documented and responded to higher levels of confirmed livestock losses in between March 28 and April 28, 2008 than in the same period in 2007. In the 2008 period, 9 wolves were killed through agency control efforts, 1 wolf was hit by a car, 1 wolf was hit by a train, 1 wolf death is under law enforcement investigation, and 1 wolf died of mange, and 1 wolf was killed on private land while caught in the act of testing livestock for a total of 14 mortalities. WS was authorized to remove up to an additional 17 wolves, one of which was due to close proximity to human dwellings and loitering behavior by an apparently habituated wolf. In 2007, 12 wolves had been authorized in the same period and 1 wolf was killed by a private citizen.

The increase in lethal control authorized in 2008 is far more reflective of what's happening on the ground than changes in the legal framework. This is because of: an increased Montana population (up 34 % from the previous year), the late spring this year and lingering heavy mountain snow pack, and that the same packs (only larger size in 2008) have been confirmed as injuring / killing livestock in areas where losses were confirmed last year. All losses so far in 2008 were confirmed on private lands and by packs that had either depredated in the same area last year or by unknown wolves predating on livestock in the same areas as had been documented in previous years.

FWP has also opted for non-lethal options in several occasions in spring, 2008. FWP decided to increase monitoring and / or requested WS to collar and release wolves at or near the depredation sights in several instances. FWP has also worked with 3 different landowners and installed fladry (regular in 2 locations on private land and electric in 1 other location on private land) and has been working collaboratively with area livestock producers and others in 4 different areas on rider projects.

Outreach and Education Activities

On April 1, FWP Sime, several other FWP representatives, and George Edwards (Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program Coordinator) attended the Devil's Kitchen meeting in Cascade. Sime and Edwards gave an update and overview of the MT wolf program and efforts to get the MT wolf reimbursement program underway. Two other presentations were given by FWP on the Mountain Lion Research Project, the Black Bear Research Project, and other FWP related items. About 60 people attended.

On April 5, former FWP Wolf Specialist Trapp gave a general "about Montana wolves" talk to about 300 people from eastern Montana at a banquet near Red Lodge.

On April 8, FWP Sime gave a talk about Montana wolves and the state's program at the Defenders of Wildlife North American Wolf Conference. On the 9th, she participated in a panel

discussion about wolf delisting and shared Montana's thoughts in support for delisting. About 180 people were present for each.

On April 16, Sime was the speaker for the graduate-level Human Dimensions of Fish and Wildlife seminar at Montana State University. About 15 people attended.

On April 22, Sime, Bradley, Ray Vinkey (Phillipsburg WL bio) and Mike Thompson (R2 Wildlife Program Manager) attended a meeting of landowners from Granite Co – Hall / Drummond area. FWP representatives provided an update on the wolf program, activities of the local Willow Ck pack, answered many questions, and listened carefully to concerns expressed about the pack, how much time they spend on private land, and the pack's large size. Follow up meetings will be scheduled to brain-storm longer term co-existence strategies. About 70 people attended.

On April 24, Sime gave a talk about MT wolves and the MT wolf program to the Student Chapter of The Wildlife Society at Montana State University. About 25 attended.

On May 1, Sime, Ross, and Kurt Alt (R3 Wildlife Program Manager) attended a meeting of the Madison Valley Ranchlands Group Wildlife Committee. Sime gave a presentation about MT wolves and the MT program. Good discussion and Q/A about delisting and the local interest in riders and securing more resources for those efforts in the Madison during the upcoming grazing season. WS State Director John Steuber and Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program Coordinator George Edwards also gave updates.

New publication available: Estimation of Successful Breeding Pairs for Wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountains, USA. Co-authors are Dr. Michael Mitchell, David Ausband, Carolyn Sime, Ed Bangs, Justin Gude, Michael Jimenez, Curt Mack, Tom Meier, Steve Nadeau, and Doug Smith. It was published in the 2008 Journal of Wildlife Management 72(4):881-891.

Research Activities

On May 1 in Missoula, FWP R1 staff, Laudon, and Sime participated in a discussion of FWP efforts to develop new monitoring protocols for wolves. A presentation was made by Dr. Michael Mitchell (UM Coop Unit) with important contributions from Dave Ausband who is leading similar work in ID and Lindsey Rich (a graduate student). Another UM graduate student (Jonathan Derbridge) presented some ideas for a study of wolf diets.

Law Enforcement Activities

On March 27, an adult male wolf was killed by a vehicle on Hwy 191 north of the Yellowstone National Park boundary. Pack affiliation of the dead wolf is unknown, but the mortality occurred within the Cougar 2 Pack territory. It could have been a member of that pack or a single passing through the area.

During the week of March 31, FWP retrieved the carcass of a wolf in northwestern Montana and it was taken to the FWP Wildlife Lab for necropsy. The case is under investigation.

On April 3, FWP (Miller) retrieved the carcass of an adult wolf found dead near Gardiner. It had been collared while a member of the Swan Lake Pack (354M). It had mange and though the collar was not operational, was the wolf seen frequently near Mammoth, Wyoming. It appeared to have died of natural causes, but a necropsy will be performed and the case is considered under investigation until cause of death is confirmed.

On April 24, a dead wolf was found and reported by a landowner on private land near Superior in far western Montana. FWP (Edwards and Feigley) retrieved the carcass. It appeared to have been hit by a train and then traveled a short distance before dying. The carcass will be sent to the lab for necropsy. The wolf was a gray yearling male and was probably a member of the Superior pack which is known to frequent that area.

Other

Groups challenging the USFWS decision to create a Northern Rocky Mountain Gray Wolf Distinct Population Segment filed their lawsuit in Missoula District Court on April 28, 2008, as expected. Plaintiff's also requested a preliminary injunction. The FWP Legal Unit is preparing a response, as FWP will seek to become a party in the lawsuit (as an intervener) in support of the federal delisting decision and to represent Montana's interests.

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To learn more about Montana's recovered wolf population, the Montana program and to help FWP monitor wolves by reporting wolf sign, visit FWP at: www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf.

To request an investigation of injured or dead livestock, call USDA Wildlife Services directly in western Montana / Helena area at 458-0106 or in eastern Montana / Columbus area at: 322-4303. Or call your nearest FWP representative to have your call referred to Wildlife Services.

To learn more about the Montana Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program available through the Montana Department of Livestock or to request an application for reimbursement of wolf-caused losses, contact the Loss Mitigation Coordinator, George Edwards, at 444-5609.

To anonymously report a dead or injured wolf or suspected illegal activity, call 1-800-TIP-MONT.